DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 525 PS 017 212

AUTHOR Avgar, Amy
TITLE The Effects of Infant Day Care on Child Development.
INSTITUTION American Jewish Committee, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Feb 87
NOTE 15p.
AVAILABLE FROM The American Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations, 165 East 56 Street, New York, NY 10022-2746 ($1.25; quantity prices on request).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attachment Behavior; Child Caregivers; Cognitive Development; *Day Care; Day Care Centers; Early Childhood Education; Emotional Development; *Employed Parents; Family Attitudes; Family Characteristics; *Infant Behavior; *Infants; *Longitudinal Studies; Social Development

ABSTRACT

Studies on the effects of early day care can be characterized according to two distinct research trends. In the first, which occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, the principal issue was whether day care had any inevitable and negative consequences for the child and, particularly, the mother-child attachment. The second, more recent, trend has been to investigate the individual, family, and institutional conditions that enhance the effects of nonmaternal care. A review of the evidence from these two research trends indicates that: (1) early day care experiences have no long-term effects on intellectual development, except for economically disadvantaged children; (2) some day-care-reared infants display more anxious or avoidant behavior than home-reared infants; (3) for certain children, early day-care experience is associated with heightened interaction with children and lower compliance with adults; and (4) attitudes and family circumstances associated with nonmaternal care, as well as the nature and quality of the caregiving, must be considered when accounting for consequences related to substitute care. These indications raise questions for a number of policy issues, including what policy initiatives deserve consideration. (PCB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED291525

The Effects of Infant Day Care on Child Development

Amy Avgar

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Steven Bayme

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 017212

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, Institute of Human Relations, 165 East 56 Street, New York, NY 10022-2746

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Amy Avgar is the Assistant Director of the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center of the American Jewish Committee. This background paper was prepared for the deliberations of the AJC's Family Policy Task Force, E. Robert Goodkind, Chair.

Copyright © 1987 by the American Jewish Committee
All rights reserved

INTRODUCTION

A great deal of debate surrounds the issue of day-care effects, and a wide range of positions have been voiced by those concerned about the welfare of children and families. At one end of this spectrum is the view held by Clarke-Stewart and her colleagues, who not only believe that day care has no appreciable ill effects on children, but that day-care-reared children are <u>better</u> off than exclusively mother-reared children. According to this view, group settings foster social maturity, independence and knowledge about the world.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Burton White's position that women ought to keep their children out of group settings until the age of three. This is a view that is shared by Fraiberg, who tends to agree that children are harmed by day care, and by Ainsworth, who feels that the mother-child attachment may be compromised. Brazelton, too, expresses concern and urges parents to stay home whenever possible.

In between those two extremes is a very wide middle ground. There are those like Rutter who are cautious but not overly concerned about the effects of good quality, well-staffed day care; Caldwell as well as Kagan are confident and optimistic about the effects of early day care exposure; Scarr and colleagues also feel that the effects of day care of reasonable quality are essentially benign.

This report attempts to unravel some of the "truths" about infant day care on the basis of empirical evidence rather than heated rhetoric. The picture that emerges is complex, and open, perhaps, to various interpretations. While no interpretation can be purely objective or value-free, a realistic picture of the day care situation must include both the positive and the negative, both the benefits and the potential risks.

While the specific focus of the report is on the effects of day care on children, we must remain cognizant of the fact that children operate within a family <u>system</u>. Thus, benefits or hardships accrued by other members of the family (in particular the mother) are likely to have spin-off effects for the system as a whole.

RESEARCH TRENDS

Studies on the effects of early day care can be characterized according to two distinct research trends. In the first (during the 1960s and 1970s), the principal issue was whether day care had any inevitable and negative consequences for the child and, particularly, for the mother-child attachment. The specific interest in the developmental consequences of day care, and the concern with negative effects, derived from the obligation of policymakers and social scientists to protect the public from harm. If day care is detrimental to development, it would be hard to make a case that policies should be adopted to promote or even support group care for young children beyond the confines of the family.

In recent years, the principal issue of concern for policy-minded researchers has become: Under what conditions do children fare best in day care? This second line of research has investigated the individual, family and institutional conditions that enhance the effects of nonmaternal supplemental care (note the shift in terms). Presumably, if a constellation of conditions that promote optimal development can be identified, then a policy imperative would exist to encourage such conditions. At the very least, there would be an obligation to assure that child-care conditions meet acceptable standards.

It is important, therefore, when considering the evidence surrounding the day-care issue, to distinguish between the two research trends. Moreover, within each of these trends, research findings on the effects of nonmaternal, supplementary care can usefully be organized around three topics -- intellectual, emotional and social development.

THE EARLIER RESEARCH

Before proceeding to review the results of this body of research, it is necessary to highlight some of the limits of the designs that typically guided early day-care investigations. To begin with, such studies were generally restricted to university-connected centers that provided high quality care (Ricciuti 1974; Kagan et al. 1978), when in fact the majority of children in child care are not in this kind of setting.* Second, early research compared groups of children whose mothers worked with those whose mothers did not. It was assumed that these represented discrete groups, although almost all children receive

* In 1982, 77 percent of all infants spending a substantial portion of their day in some nonmaternal care were cared for in their own homes or someone else's, with strikingly few in those highly visible day-care centers which are commonly associated with the term "day care." The most

some care beyond parental childbearing. Finally, differences in development were attributed to the mother's employment and absence as a caretaker, whereas other differences (such as income, education and a variety of family circumstances) may in fact exert a more powerful influence. Newer evidence suggests that home-reared children may differ from the day-care group before variation in child care is experienced. With these limitations in mind, we turn to the evidence on differences in developmental outcomes as related to the day-care experience.

Intellectual Development and Academic Achievement

The evidence suggests that for most children the day care experience has neither beneficial nor adverse effects on subsequent intellectual development, as measured by standardized IQ tests (Belsky and Steinberg 1978; Galinsky 1986). However, for economically disadvantaged children or those who are more "at risk" than the average middle-class child, early day-care experiences seem to reduce the declines in test scores that typically appear after 18 months (Ramey, Dorval and Barker-Ward, 1981; O'Connell and Farran 1982; Belsky 1985). A number of studies have demonstrated greater language development and competence in communication among children enrolled in enrichment programs from infancy. Significantly, quality of child care has been found to have a greater impact in this respect than the family's background and education (McCartney et al. 1982). This is a particularly important finding, first, because it is linguistic competency upon which subsequent intellectual growth is likely to build (Belsky 1985). Second, teachers tend to perceive children with better language skills as more intelligent (Galinsky 1986). This, in turn, has a potential influence on the child's self-image and performance in school.

Emotional Development

Since day care, by definition, implies frequent separation between mother and child, a good deal of attention has been devoted to discovering whether child care outside the home does indeed disrupt the child's emotional tie to the mother. The assumption is that the quality of this relationship has implications for later development.

The major strategy for assessing the quality of attachment has been to observe the response of children, usually at 12-18 months, to separation from and reunion with their mothers, in unfamiliar laboratory playrooms. Behavior in the mother's absence and upon reunion is classified as either secure, anxious/avoidant or anxious/resistant (Ainsworth

---

recent statistics for children under 3 reveal that, as of June 1985, 45 percent were cared for by a relative (27 percent at home; 18 percent at relatives' homes), 24 percent were in family day care, and 10 percent were in centers or other group facilities (Kamerman 1986).

1979; Belsky, Steinberg and Walker 1982; Vaughn, Gove and Egeland 1980; Gamble and Zigler 1986). The authors of several recent and comprehensive reviews of this research (Galinsky 1986; Belsky and Isabella 1986; Gamble and Zigler 1986) arrive at a similar conclusion: that there is an emerging pattern in which nonmaternal child care, especially that initiated in the first year, whether in homes or in centers, is associated with the tendency on the part of some infants to avoid or maintain distance following a series of brief separations. Since this behavior pattern is regarded by most developmentalists as related to other problematic developmental outcomes, some are inclined to view "insecure" behavior in the laboratory situation as evidence that the child's future development may be in jeopardy (Fraiberg 1977).

Both Zigler and Belsky caution against jumping to such a conclusion. Zigler notes that even the most pessimistic results indicate that more than 50 percent of those infants in substitute care from their first year were securely attached. And he goes on to cite a number of factors that may cause out-of-home care to have more powerful effects on some parent-child attachments than others, including personality characteristics of the child and/or primary caregiver, and degree of family stress. Belsky and Isabella note that different scientists read the very same evidence in very different ways:

"Even though the same pattern of avoidance is noted, it is interpreted not as deficit or disturbance but rather as adaptive and possibly even precocious behavior" (1986, p. 23). Day-care infants experience many separations; thus it seems sensible for them not to orient toward the mother. In addition, children tend to remain more distant from parents as they get older. Therefore, the behavior of day-care-reared 12-18-month-olds may be evidence of maturity. As Clarke-Stewart and Fein write:

> In children receiving care exclusively from mother, avoidance may be a pathological response reflecting an interactive history with a rejecting mother, while for children in day care, greater distance from....mother at reunion may be an adaptive response reflecting a habitual reaction to repeated daily separations and reunions (1983, p. 949).

Social Development

Day care appears to have both positive and negative effects on social development. Children with infant day-care experience have been found to be more sociable, more willing to play with unfamiliar children, more cooperative and more empathetic. At the same time, children in day care can be more assertive and aggressive with their friends and less cooperative with adults (Belsky and Isabella 1986). The evidence of increased aggression, lack of compliance, and even maladjustment as related to day-care experiences, is interpreted by some as expectable outcomes of an avoidant attachment that places the child at risk for

subsequent social difficulties. However, as in the case of other developmental outcomes, social development is related not only to child-care experiences but also to a host of other factors.

As Belsky and Isabella (1986) write:

> When we find infants in care, we are not only likely to find them in a variety of arrangements, usually resulting from their mothers working outside the home, but also for a variety of reasons and with a variety of feelings and family practices associated with these care arrangements... Thus, it would be misguided to attribute any "effects" of nonmaternal care to the care per se, or even to the mother's employment (p. 34).

THE SECOND RESEARCH WAVE

The second wave of research is addressed to the issue of what experiences make a difference in terms of the outcomes of day care.

Day-Care Conditions

Among the factors that shape the day-care experience, greatest attention has been paid to group size, adult-child ratio and caregiver training. Since these are aspects that lend themselves to legislative intervention and regulation, policy-minded researchers have been interested in learning about how they influence developmental outcomes.

The National Day Care Study, which involved the systematic evaluation of 65 centers in three metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Detroit and Seattle), revealed that group size and caregiver training were among the most important factors with respect to cognitive and linguistic development (Ruopp and Travers 1982). In groups of fewer than 15-18 children, caregivers were involved in more questioning, responding, praising and comforting, and less straight monitoring of children and interaction with adults. And, children in smaller groups were more actively involved in activities. The authors concluded that group size affects caregiving, which, in turn, influences the child's functioning and development.

With respect to staff qualifications, the National Day Care Study found that specialized training in areas such as child development or early childhood education was more significant than general level of formal education in promoting a high degree of social interaction with children. Training also had a positive influence on test gains.

Stability (of staff, peer group and setting) has also emerged as an important situational factor (Rubenstein and Howes 1979; Cummings, 1980)

that influences the outcomes of the day-care experience. High staff turnover, fluctuation in the peer group, or frequent changes in day-care settings, appears to be associated with greater stress for children, which, in turn, has implications for subsequent development.

Evaluations of day-care facilities and existing regulations for mandating acceptable standards of operation reveal great variation in conditions and outcomes. The evidence suggests that in centers and family day-care homes in which group size is modest, ratios are low, and staff training is high, caregivers tend to be more stimulating, responsive, and positively affectionate, as well as less restrictive. Moreover, children who experience such care tend to be more intellectually competent and more emotionally secure (Fosburg and Hawkins 1981; Young and Zigler 1986; Belsky and Isabella 1986). When group size is large and ratios are poor, individual attention to children is restricted by an overextended set of resources, and children may be exposed to potential physical harm. As a result, controlling and management activities on the part of the caregiver may increase as well as overt distress or apathy on the part of the child (Ruopp and Travers 1982; Ruopp et al. 1974). These findings are consistent with theories of child development. The same parental qualities that promote healthy psychological development in infancy are also necessary if caregivers are to be suitable parental substitutes.

The Role of Family Stress

The role of stress has been studied in relationship to mother-child attachments. Since mother and child exist within a larger social environment, many events influence the behavior of each, altering the nature of the relationship. Thus, parent-infant attachment must be considered in the broader contexts of individual and environmental differences. Summarizing the research in this area, Gamble and Zigler (1986) conclude as follows:

> Given a relatively unstressed family situation in which the primary caregiver is emotionally available to the infant on a consistent basis, it seems likely that daily separations will not seriously affect quality of attachment. On the other hand, in the context of an already stressful environment, such separation might in itself be added stress on the infant. If the parent is also under stress and so less emotionally available, and if the infant is less robust with regard to such patterns of care, this constellation of factors may place the infant at greater risk for the development of an insecure attachment (pp. 34-35).

Factors Contributing to Stressful Family Environments

What kinds of situations contribute to family stress? To begin

with, it has long been recognized that the meaning attributed to the mother's employment affects the way the family reacts (Birnbaum 1971; Hoffman and Nye 1975). If the father is opposed to the mother's employment or the mother feels guilty about leaving her child, over-compensation can result in added stress on parent and child. On the other hand, when work is seen as integral for the well-being of the family as a whole, children often develop a sense of pride and the feeling of working together as a family (Galinsky 1986).

Research on attachment suggests that insecure infants are found more often in families where the mother returned to work or school before the child was 12 months old (Vaughn et al. 1980). These families tend to be from lower rather than higher social groups, and headed by a single parent rather than intact. Each of these factors -- economic status and number of parents in the home -- is related to stress.

Finally, job-related stresses can be carried home by both parents, and marital tensions in the home can exacerbate the way parents cope with child rearing on a day-to-day basis. When these are coupled with concerns about the quality of care or with guilt about having to work, they are likely to affect not only the physical but the emotional availability of the mother (Gamble and Zigler 1986).

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

To summarize the evidence reviewed above on the effects of infant day care, it would appear that:

1. Early day care experiences have no long-term or sustained effects on subsequent intellectual development, except in the case of the economically disadvantaged children who have been enrolled in enrichment programs since infancy.

2. Some day-care-reared infants display more anxious/avoidant behavior than home-reared infants.

3. For certain children, early day-care experience is associated with heightened interaction (both positive and negative) with children and lower compliance and cooperation with adults.

4. Attitudes and family circumstances associated with nonmaternal care, as well as the nature of the group setting and quality of caregiving, must be considered when attempting to account for any adverse consequences related to substitute care in the first year.

The summary of this evidence raises a number of questions for policy deliberation:

1. Given what is known today about the effects of day care and the fact that the "final word" is not yet in on the long-range or "sleeper" effects of early day-care exposure, do we want to make a case that policies should be adopted to promote or even support group day care for young children beyond the confines of the family?

2. Given the fact that, for many women, work outside the home is an economic or personal necessity and, like it or not, many children will be exposed to day care at an early age, do we have an obligation to advocate policies that would assure that child-care conditions meet acceptable standards (i.e., high staff-child ratio, small group size, stability among care-givers, trained personnel)?

3. Given the cost of high quality day care (estimated by some as at least $150 per child per week), is there any value in establishing standards that would make day care too costly for the majority of families?

4. What alternative policy initiatives might be examined?

Responses to the day-care dilemma by those concerned with the well-being of children and families cover a wide spectrum of possibilities, ranging from further research to policies that would allow women to take time off to be with their newborn infants.

The following is a partial list of policy initiatives that deserve consideration:

1. In order to fully understand the long-term consequences of infant care, more research (as opposed to heated rhetoric) is needed. Such research must be process-oriented, longitudinal and sensitive to the developmental and environmental complexity of infant day care.

2. Steps need to be taken to allow communities and families to benefit from research findings on day care. There is an abundance of information that needs to be available to providers and consumers. To this end a national forum for discussion and clearinghouses for dissemination of information are in order.

3. Model day-care programs that have a formal parent-provider partnership are another mechanism for educating parents and providers. As consumers of day care, parents are not buying a service but choosing an environment in which their children will spend a large part of their early lives. Parents have the potential to be powerful forces in influencing aspects of their infants' day-care experiences. Moreover, parent-provider partnerships (in the tradition of Head Start) may, in

the long run, be more effective than the perfunctory yearly state licensing visits.

4. Finally, policy advocates need to consider the possibility of paid infant-care leaves, on the one hand, and legitimization of part-time jobs, on the other. For health reasons alone, an argument could be made for encouraging women to keep very young children out of group settings. In addition, even staunch advocates of day care recognize that early infancy is the time when parents and child form relationships and become synchronized with one another. Parents need opportunities to become skillful at parenting, to redefine family roles and to adjust to the changes that the newborn introduces into the system. Infants need time to develop primary attachments. Developmentalists estimate a period of three to six months for these relationships to become established.

The United States is the only Western nation that does not have some form of uniform paid infant care leave available to all parents. Given the high cost of quality infant day care, more information is needed to determine if paid infant care leaves would be more cost effective in the long run.

Part-time jobs offer another potential solution for working mothers. Yet, in America, part-time work is often stigmatized, undervalued and underrewarded. Greater attention needs to be paid to the possibility of upgrading part-time jobs and other nontraditional solutions to job/family role conflicts.

REFERENCES

Ainsworth, M.D.S. 1973. The development of infant-mother attachment. In Review of child development research, ed. B.M. Caldwell and H.N. Ricciuli, 3:1-94. Chicago: Uni ersity of Chicago Press.

Ainsworth, M.D.S. 1979. Attachment as related to mother-infant interaction. In Advances in the study of behavior (Vol. 9), ed. J.S. Rosenblatt. New York: Academic Press.

Belsky, J. 1985. Prepared statement on the effects of day care. Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families. Improving child care services: What can be done? Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Belsky, J. and Steinberg, L.D. 1978. The effects of day care: A critical review. Child Development 49:929-949.

Belsky, J., Steinberg, L.D., and Walker, A. 1982. The ecology of day

care. In Childrearing in nontraditional families, ed. M. Lamb, 71-116. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Belsky, J. and Isabella, R. 1986. The "effects" of infant day care on social and emotional development. To appear in M. Wolraich and D. Routh Advances in developmental and behavioral pediatrics (Vol. 9). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Birnbaum, J.A., 1971. Life patterns, personality style and self-esteem in family oriented and career committed women. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan.

Brazelton, T.B. 1986. Issues for working parents. Amer. J. Orthopsychiat. 56:14-25

Caldwell, B.M., Wright, C.M., Honig, A.S., and Tannenbaum, B.S. 1970. Infant day care and attachment. Amer. J. Orthopsychiat. 56:14-25.

Clarke-Stewart, K.A., and Fein, G. 1983. Early childhood programs. In Handbook of Child Psychology, ed. M.M. Marth and J.J. Campos. Vol. 2: Infancy and developmental psychology. New York: Wiley.

Cummings, E.M. 1980. Caregiver stability and day care. Developmental Psychol. 16:31-27.

Fosburg, S. and Hawkins, P. 1981. Final report of the National Day Care Home Study (Vol. 1). Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books.

Fraiberg, S. 1977. Every child's birthright: In defense of mothering. New York: Basic Books.

Galinsky, E. 1986 (March). How do child care and maternal employment affect children? Exchange.

Gamble, T.J. and Zigler, E. 1986. Effects of infant day care: Another look at the evidence. Amer. J. of Orthopsychiat. 56:26-41.

Hoffman, L.W. and Nye, I.F. 1975. Working mothers: An Evaluation review of the consequences for wife, husband and child. Washington, D.C.: Jossey-Bass.

Kagan, J., Koarsley, R., and Zelazo, P. 1976. The effects of infant day care on psychological development. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Boston.

Kamerman, S. 1986 (February). Infant care usage in the U.S. Report to National Academy of Sciences Committee on Policy Issues in Child Care for Infants and Toddlers. Washington, D.C.

McCartney, V.S., Scarr, D., Phillips, S., Garjek, S. and Schwartz, J.C. 1982. Environmental differences among day care centers and their

effects on children's development. In Day Care: Scientific and Social Policy Issues, ed. E. Zigler and E.W. Gordon. Boston, Mass.: Auburn House.

O'Connell, J.C. and Farran, D.C. 1982. Effects of day care experience on the use of intentional communicative behaviors in a sample of socioeconomically depressed infants. Developmental Psychol. 18:22-29.

Ramey, C., Dorval, B. and Barker-Ward, L. 1981. Group day care and socially disadvantaged families: Effects on the child and family. In Advances in early education and day care, ed. S. Kilmer. Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press.

Ricciuti, H.N. 1974. Fear and the development of social attachments in the first year of life. In The origins of fear, ed. M. Lewish and L.A. Rosenblum, 73-106. New York: Wiley.

Rubenstein, J.L. and Howes, C.1979. Caregiving and infant behavior in day care and in homes. Developmental Psychol. 15:1-24.

Ruopp, R. and Travers, J. 1982. Janus faces day care: Perspectives on quality and cost. In Day care: Scientific and social policy issues, ed. E. Zigler and E.W. Gordon. Boston, Mass.: Auburn House.

Ruopp, R. et al. 1979. Children at the center. Final report of the National Day Care Study: Summary findings and their implications. Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books.

Rutter, M. 1981. Social-emotional consequences of day care for pre-school children. American J. Orthopsychiat. 51:4-28.

Scarr, S. 1984. Mother care/other care. New York: Basic Books

Vaughn, B., Gove, F. L., and Egeland, B. 1980. The relationship between out-of-home care and the quality of infant-mother attachment in an economically disadvantaged population. Child Development 51:1203-1214.

White, B. 1975. The child from birth to three. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Young, K. and Zigler, E. 1986. Infant and toddler care: Regulations and policy implications. American J. Orthopsychiat. 56:43-55.

7728-JCAD-4:tp
2/5/87

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56 Street, New York, NY 10022

February 1987

Single copy $1.25
Quantity prices on request